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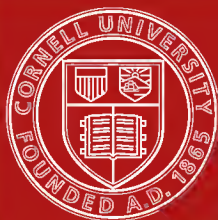
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# THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

BY  
JOHN MASEFIELD



LONDON  
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

TO  
MAJOR THE HON. NEVILLE LYTTON

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LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN, 1919



## FOREWORD

I HAVE been asked to write a few words of preface to this little book.

While I was in France, in the late summer and autumn of 1916, it was suggested that I should write a History of the Battle of the Somme, then in its second stage or act. In discussing the plan of the book, it was decided that I should begin with some account of the attacks upon Verdun (which the Battle of the Somme ended), and end with the taking of Bapaume, then hoped for, but not expected to happen at once. In order that I might write with full knowledge, some arrangements were planned, by which I could go again to Verdun, to visit some positions which I had not seen. It was made possible for me to go to the Somme, certain introductions were given to me, and I was formally requested to write the History.

After some delay, I was permitted to go again to the Somme battlefield, and to live on or near it for those months of 1917 when our Armies were advancing in all that area. It was made possible for

me to watch the advance of our Armies from point to point and from valley to crest, and to trace those old, much more grim advances, in the area from which the enemy had been beaten in the first months of the attack. During those months I walked over every part of the Somme battlefield in which British troops had been engaged, over every part at least twice, and over many parts, which specially moved me, such as Delville Wood, High Wood, Pozières, Mouquet Farm, Thiepval, and the Hawthorn Ridge, more times than I can remember. I came to know that blasted field as well as I know my own home. I saw much there which I am not likely to forget.

In June, 1917, when I felt that I knew the ground so intimately well, from every point of view, that I could follow any written record or report of the fighting, I returned to England, hoping to be permitted to consult the Brigade and Battalion diaries, as in 1916, when I wrote a history of the campaign in Gallipoli. It was not possible for me to obtain access to these documents, and as only four others, of any worth, existed, my plan for the book had to be abandoned.

Feeling that perhaps some who had lost friends in the battle might care to know something of the landscape in which the battle was fought, I wrote a little study of the position of the lines, as they stood on July 1, 1916. This study, under the title *The Old Front Line*, was published at the end of 1917. I then

attempted to write an account of the battle from what I had seen and heard, and had written as much as is here printed, when I was turned to other work, of another kind, many miles from Europe and the war.

Scanty as the books are, they would have been scantier but for him to whom I dedicate them. By his kindness and forethought much which would have been difficult and disappointing was made possible and pleasant. The disappointment of having to forego the task of writing of our Armies in their victory was but a small thing when set beside the memory of so much that was an inspiration and a delight.

JOHN MASEFIELD.



## THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

A MOMENT before the whistles blew, in the morning of July 1, 1916, when the Battle of the Somme began, the No Man's Land, into which our men advanced, was a strip of earth without life, made smoky, dusty, and dim by explosions which came out of the air upon it, and left black, curling, slowly fading, dust and smoke-devils behind them. Into this smoke and dust and dimness, made intenser by the stillness of the blue summer morning, came suddenly the run of many thousands of men at the point of death. Not less than twenty thousand men clambered up the parapet at that instant. They tripped and tore through the wire, already in lanes, and went on to their fronts, into the darkness of death, cheering each other with cries that could be heard above the roaring and the crashing of the battle. On the instant, before all the men were out of the trenches,

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the roaring lifted up its voice as the fire doubled and the enemy machine guns opened.

Many men among those thousands were hit as they showed above the parapet, many others never cleared the wire; but the rest drew clear and went forward, some walking, some running, most of them in a kind of jog-trot, some aligned in a slow advance or in rushes of platoons, till the green river of the No Man's Land was dotted with their moving bodies throughout the sector. Perhaps not many of all those thousands knew what was happening even quite close at hand, for in those times all souls are shaken, and the air was dim, and the tumult terrible. Watchers in our old lines saw only a multitude of men crossing a dimness which kept glittering. They saw many of the runners falling as they ran, some getting up and going on, others moving a little, others lying still. They saw as it were dead lines, where all the runners fell, even the strongest. They saw promising swarms of men dropping in twos or threes, till the rush was only a few men, who went on until they fell like the others and lay in little heaps in their tracks. There was nothing to show why they fell. Men looked for them to rise and go on with the few little leading figures who were drawing near to the enemy wire. They could see no enemy. They could not even see the jets of smoke, hardly

bigger than the puffs blown from a kettle at the instant of boiling, which spurted from enemy machine guns along the whole line.

Within a few minutes, the second and third waves were following on the first, not knowing, in that darkness of dust and tumult, what success had been won, if any.

Our attack was made on a front of sixteen miles. To the south of this, at the same moment, the French attacked on a front of nine miles. Let the reader imagine any narrow strip of twenty-five miles known to him—the course of the Thames, say, from London to Maidenhead, or from Pangbourne to Oxford—suddenly rushed by many thousands of men, many of them falling dead or maimed upon the way. For the look of the charge let him remember some gust of wind on a road in autumn when the leaves are lying. The gust sweeps some array of leaves into the road and flings them forward in a rush strangely like the rush of men as seen from a distance. As in the rush of men, many leaves drop out, crawl again forward, cease, quiver, and lie still; many others lose touch or direction, the impulse may falter, the course swerve, but some are whirled across the road into the gutters at the other side.

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To cross the No Man's Land took from a minute to two minutes of time. Perhaps most of those who were in that attack were too dizzy with the confusion and tumult, the effort to keep touch and the straining to find out what was happening to the flanks and in front, to take stock of their own sensations. These things have been said about the attack :

(a) "I heard the man behind me slip on the ladder. 'The damned thing,' he said. 'I'll miss the bloody train.' They were putting over whizz-bangs rather a lot; but I didn't notice any near me. I felt just ordinary.

"Their wire had been nicely cut. I'd been afraid we might be hung up while we cut it. I heard a whut-whut-whut, just like that, just alongside my ears. 'You ——s,' I said, 'that's a bloody machine gun in your bloody wire,' I said. So afterwards, when it was all over, I went back, and they'd got a bloody little machine gun covered over in a shell-hole, shooting through a kind of box in a sort of funnel, along with two Boches; but they'd been caught with a bomb, it looked like."

(b) "I'd had a bet with one of our fellows that there was a sniper's post just where I said it was, 'cos I'd figured it out it must be about there. So when I went over I thought, 'We'll see now



who'll get them fags.' The funny part of it was we were both wrong about the sniper. I don't know where he was."

(c) "About an hour before we went over, they got on to our jumping-off trenches and fairly plugged us with a lot of heavy stuff as well; so when we went across I said, 'You —s, you wait till I get in among you; I'll get some of my own back.'"

(d) "Going across wasn't so bad, but when we started to consolidate our bit of trench we kept running out of bombs. If we could have had a good supply of bombs all day the Fritzes would have had no show at all. Bombs are heavy to carry. One of our bombers must have been hit as he was coming up. He was wearing his bomber's jacket all full of bombs, and they blew him all to pieces. They bombed us out afterwards. They held us up at the end where we were, up against the sandbags, and then they got up like to the side and bombed us clean out. Just before they got us out we found some hair-brush bombs; they don't have them much now, but they had that lot all right."

(e) "What did I think while I was going over? I thought my last hour had come. They'd got a machine gun every five yards, it

sounded like. 'By God,' I said, 'give me London every time.'"

(f) "It's my opinion there'll be some queer revelations about this war after it's all over. I often thought of that when we were in it; not about the soldiers so much, but about the financiers."

(g) "After we'd got back into our trenches we saw a big Boche jump up on to the parapet and wave a great big Red Cross flag, and we saw their men go out with stretchers, to bring in our wounded, we thought. Then we saw they were shooting at our wounded. Whenever they stirred they turned machine guns on them; we could see the bullets going phut all round them. So then we looked to see what they were doing with the stretchers. What they were bringing in under the Red Cross flag was our Lewis guns which our poor chaps had been carrying.

"All day long they kept us from bringing in any of our wounded. Whenever our stretcher-bearers went out they turned machine guns on to them at once. But one of our fellows went out and brought in about twenty, one after the other. He carried them in on his back till he was quite worn out. His name was Smiley or some such name."

(h) "The Boche varied from place to place. Just near where we were he was very decent, and sent us in a list of the names of the prisoners he'd taken. Afterwards we found that he'd buried our dead and put up crosses to them: 'To a brave Englisher.' 'To brave English soldiers.' This was a fine thing to have done; for it wasn't healthy by any means out in front of his wire. They were Bavarians who did this."

(i) "Before we went over we were in a shallow jumping-off trench. It wasn't a trench, it was really the bank beside a road. We were being shelled with whizz-bangs. We hadn't any real shelter, but were crouched down under the bank. I looked along my men. Some were cursing and mad; I don't think they knew what they were doing, but about every other man was praying."

(j) "I noticed that several men were inclined to take off their clothes before the attack. It may be fear in some cases, but then it was very hot, and there was the feeling that one would advance better free. One wants all one's strength, and the things pressing on the body seem to choke you. During the attack I saw one man who was stark mad and stark naked,

both, running round in the No Man's Land, yelling at the top of his voice. They got him into a dressing-station, and they had a bad time with him, for he wouldn't speak, he would only yell, and they couldn't make out whether he was a Boche or one of our own chaps. I don't know what became of him. Probably when they got him down and gave him a bath and cut his hair he remembered himself."

(k) "They call us 'the poor bloody infantry.' We deserve the name, for we get into most of the trouble when there is any, and all of the mud when there isn't. But I say that the airmen have the hardest time, for they're in danger the instant they leave the ground; and they live over the enemy lines, in a cloud of shrapnel, and they come right down to take photographs, or to draw fire when they are spotting batteries, or to scatter infantry. On the 1st of July they were just over our heads, as bold as brass. They spotted for us, and when the Boche counter-attacked they dived right down and took them on with their machine guns. When they come down, I believe they fall asleep at once from nervous strain."

(l) "I made up my mind that I was going to be killed. I was to be in the third wave. While

I was waiting, during the last half-hour, I kept saying to myself: 'In half an hour you will be dead. In twenty-five minutes you will be dead. In twenty minutes you will be dead. In a quarter of an hour you will be dead.' I wondered what it would feel like to be dead. I thought of all the people I liked, and the things I wanted to do, and told myself that that was all over, that I had done with that; but I was sick with sorrow all the same. Sorrow isn't the word either: it is an ache and anger and longing to be alive. There was a terrific noise and confusion, but I kept thinking that I heard a lark; I think a lark had been singing there before the shelling increased. A rat dodged down the trench among the men, and the men hit at it, but it got away. I felt very fond of all my men. I hoped that they would all come through it. I had told them some time before to 'fix swords.' I wondered how many of them would unfix swords, and when. Then I thought, 'When I start I must keep a clear head. I must remember this and this and this.' Then I thought again, 'In about five minutes now I shall be dead.' I envied people whom I had seen in billets two nights before. I thought, 'They will be alive at dinner-time to-day, and

to-night they'll be snug in bed ; but where shall I be ? My body will be out there in No Man's Land ; but where shall I be ? What is done to people when they die ?' The time seemed to drag like hours and at the same to race. The noise became a perfect hell of noise, and the barrage came down on us, and I knew that the first wave had started. After that I had no leisure for thought, for we went over."

(*m*) "I was in a blue funk lest I should show that I was. We had a sergeant, who was killed afterwards at Le Sars, an Englishman. I really believe he enjoyed it. He was an old soldier who had been in South Africa, an elderly man ; quite forty-five or more. He walked up and down in the bay smoking his pipe, with his eyes shining, and every now and then he would say something about South Africa ; not about the fighting there, but about some man or other who had got drunk or deserted, or stolen something. He made me feel that, after all, that is what life is : you get together with a lot of other fellows, in a pub or somewhere, and swap a story or two about the blackguards you've known, and then you go out and get knocked on the head by a set of corner-boys."

(*n*) "I tried to tell myself that I was doing

it for this or that reason, to make it sound better; but it didn't make it any better, I didn't believe those grand things. When you are waiting to be killed, those damned newspapers seem damned thin, and so do those damned poets about the Huns. The Fritzes are a dirty lot, but they are damned brave, you may say what you like. And being killed by a lot of damned Fritzes is a damned bad egg, and no amount of tosh will alter it."

North of the Ancre River the fight was to contain the enemy; south of the Ancre we fought to advance. In this volume nothing will be said of the containing fighting to the north of the river, except that it was severe and continuous. It needs, and will receive, a volume to itself. In this volume the story will be that of the advance, during the first stage of the battle, which ended on the 14th of July, and of the great attack on the night of the 14th of July, which ended some three weeks later in the capture of Pozières, and the vital, highest points in the enemy's second line.

In the attack of the 1st of July it happened that our first success in the advance was at the eastern flank of our sector, at the village of Maricourt, where our extreme right joined the extreme left of the

French. This account of the battle will begin with this eastern, or right flank of the advance, and will proceed from point to point, westward and northward, to the Leipzig above the Ancre, where the tide of our success was stayed during these first two stages of the battle.

From Maricourt, where the French were fighting beside us, the thrust of the attack was in two directions: towards the east, to the romantic dingle of Favière Wood, and towards the north, to the brickworks of Montauban. These works stood beside a road from Maricourt to Longueval, about half a mile from Montauban village. They consisted of two big blocks of building, one on each side of the road, with outlying offices and furnaces. The enemy had burrowed under them, so as to make an underground fort, to which the ruins of the works, soon nothing more than a heap of bricks, made excellent head-cover. The fort was strengthened with concrete, reinforced with iron girders. It contained living rooms for many men, and emplacements for many machine guns. As it lay on a plateau-top, well back from a contour line, it had a good field of fire in all directions. As at Mouquet Farm, later in the battle, all that could be seen from outside it was a heap of brick. This fort of the brickworks was linked by communication trenches



to a strong enemy line which defended Montauban and the two big adjacent woods of Bernafay and Trones. It made an advanced redoubt to these works, just as Mouquet Farm did to the Zollern Trench. Two other outlying forts covered the Montauban-Mametz Road, but, though these were wired, it was thought that they were not likely to be so dangerous as the brickworks. Our preliminary fire upon the brickworks and Montauban was exceedingly heavy, constant, and accurate. It could be well observed and corrected from observation posts in the trees behind our lines, and the enemy at this part of the line had not, at that stage of the battle, any great concentration of men and guns. It happened that our attack upon the brickworks, Montauban village, and the road down to Mametz, all the extreme right wing of our battle, was swiftly successful, and without great losses. The brickworks had been so rained upon with shells that they gave little trouble, and the Manchesters were established there and in Montauban village before noon. On the left of this successful attack, where our men had to storm the steep little hill on which Mametz stands, the approach was slower; but in the late afternoon Mametz, or what was left of it, was ours, and the cellars and piles of rubble covering machine guns had been bombed quiet.

No attempt was made to storm Fricourt during this first day of the battle. It was thought that the Salient there could be pressed on both sides and so forced to surrender. The capture of Mametz gave us a strong and commanding position on the east flank of the Salient. Its west flank was threatened by a strong attack upon all that side.

This attack, or rather this series of attacks, which had for its objectives the three, four, or five sets of wired lines in the enemy system above a perfect natural glaxis, brought our men across the chalk slope, like a slightly tilted table-top, on the west side of the Salient, into position on the west side of Fricourt Wood. With one division entrenched in Mametz and this second division to the west on the line of the Contalmaison Road, the Fricourt Salient was pinched in securely on both sides before night-fall of the first day. It is said that many of the Fricourt garrison, knowing that they were lost, crept out, or rather were withdrawn, from the Salient as soon as it was dark that night.

To the west of this Fricourt fighting, our men got up Chapes Spur, following the spring of the great mine there, and shut in the little village of La Boisselle on that side. The attack upon La Boisselle itself did not carry more than a part of the village. This was not the fault of the attackers, but the result

of things which will be described later. While La Boisselle held out, no progress could be made up Mash Valley on its western side. To the west of Mash Valley, the fort or stronghold of Ovillers held out, exactly as La Boisselle did, and for the same reasons, though just beyond Ovillers (on the western slope of Ovillers Hill) our men secured enough ground to flank the place on that side. Still further to the west, on the Leipzig, our men stormed the end of the Salient, beat and bombed the enemy out of the quarry there, and contrived to hold it, though they could not capture the Wonder Work beyond.

To the north of this a very gallant attack was made upon Thiepval. Some of the troops in this attack fought their way up the shallow valley under what was called the Schwaben Redoubt, till they reached a point called the Crucifix, near the enemy's Second-Line System. This point, however, could not be held, so that the end of the Leipzig Salient was the most northern point permanently secured by the first day's fighting.

The evening, like the day, was of a perfect summer beauty, with a slight fine-weather haze. It was good weather for flying, though not perfect for observation. The ground was dry and hard, and the weather promised to be steadily fine. On the whole, the first day of the advance to the south of the

Ancre had been very successful. To the south of the Somme, where the ground for many miles together is without those strongly marked tactical features which give good observation and positions easy to defend, the French had made triumphant progress, with little loss, against a surprised and shaken enemy. North of the Somme, we had captured a big bow of land from Montauban Brickworks to Mametz, and another, smaller, but important bow, from Sausage Valley to Fricourt. Fricourt Salient was almost ours; its surrender had been made quite certain by the capture of the flanks of its approaches. La Boisselle and Ovillers were both closely pressed, the Leipzig had been mauled and a part of it taken. Altogether (setting aside the French conquests) we had won some two miles of front for a distance of from half a mile to a mile; that is, we had advanced over about an eighth part of the front attacked. Elsewhere, we had held and shaken the enemy, had captured many prisoners and some guns, and had destroyed many bays of trench and miles of wire.

During all the day, and through a part of the night, many strange things were done and reported. Many small parties of our men attacking in the dust, darkness, and confusion of the battle, over ground piled of its landmarks and cut into wandering trenches all

alike, all ruined, smashed, and full of dead, had gone on in the tumult, far from any planned objective, till they were lost. Even outside the trenches, it is not easy to find one's way over that blasted moor of mud, from which all the landmarks have been blown. Inside the trenches it is almost impossible ; one sap looks like another, one communication trench is like another, one blown-in dugout, or corpse, is like another, and all saps and trenches zigzag and run out of the straight, so that one cannot tell direction. These men, wandering forward, perhaps chasing enemies, from one unknown alley to another, in excitement and danger, far from any possibility of direction or guidance, lost themselves, sometimes half a mile behind the enemy front line. The history of these lost parties will never be known ; but there were many of them, from a company to two or three men strong, and their achievements, if collected, would make good reading. Some were destroyed or captured ; others, building themselves barricades in the enemy trench, fought all day long against whatever enemy came against them, and after fighting all day, till darkness, they fought or picked their way home, often bringing prisoners with them. It is certain that some of these lost men working in parties or alone, coming suddenly upon some hidden machine gun and putting it out of action, were vital

to parts of our advance. The coming back of these lost men, with their amazing stories, was one of the wonders of the day.

The night was strange and terrible in other ways. Over all the front of the battle there was a heavy fire from the enemy and a going and coming of men. Captured trenches had to be secured; the new line had to be marked and rounded off, with wire to the front and barricades at the sap-heads. The new positions had to be linked up with the old, so that men and stores might be moved to them rapidly. Much of them had to be repaired; parts of them, for one reason or another, were untenable; from other parts, thrusts had to be made, to clear away the enemy. All this adjustment of the line and the settling of what was to be or could be held had to be done and tested under fire and in the half darkness of a summer night by great numbers of men. All over the battlefield there was a restless movement of multitudes, as the battalions and the carriers moved up and down. Prisoners were being searched, examined, and sent back. The dead were being gathered for burial and the wounded were being picked up from the shell-holes and wrecks of trenches where they still lay. Endless work of preparation went on all over the conquered ground; dumps had to be formed and observation posts to be dug; and

signallers with many miles of telephone wire had to link up posts, stations, and positions with the various headquarters. Behind our old lines there was a similar uneasy heaving; for the batteries were moving up.

The night passed in this going and coming of men. A business (as of ants), which seemed confused, yet still had a purpose, covered the field. At the same time the battle raged throughout the sector so hotly that the running fire of flashes never died out of the sky. All over the field the glimmers and bursts of fire lit little places and showed groups of men at work—path-clearers, signallers, carriers—preparing for the morrow. In parts of the field, even at midnight, hand-to-hand fighting went on for trenches and bits of trenches which the fighters could not see. The great owls cruised over the field, crying their cries. Star-shells rose and poised and floated and fell down. The rattle and crash of firing, though muffled in that Silent Land, sometimes rose up to such a pitch that people in Amiens (twenty miles away) got out of bed to listen, and felt their windows trembling like live things to the roll of that great drum.

At dawn on the second day our troops began to put an end to the enemy salient at Fricourt.

Fricourt itself, the little village, is built at the end

of a tongue or finger of land which has a narrow gully (with the Contalmaison Road in it) on the west, and a narrow valley (with a stagnant brook in it) on the east. The slope of the tongue, which broadens as it rises, is upwards, towards the north, so that in advancing upon it from the south one has to climb. Slightly above the village, to the north and north-east of it, is the irregularly shaped, straight-sided wood of Fricourt, which is 1,000 yards long, narrow near the village, but broader higher up, with an average breadth of a quarter of a mile. This wood was now (July 2) outflanked on the east by our troops in Mametz, but it was still a strong enemy fortress, with secure approaches to the salient and secure lines of retreat to the higher fortified ground behind it, further to the north. Like all other parts of the salient, the wood was edged and crossed with deep and strong trenches of the usual enemy pattern, difficult to storm at the best of times. On the 2nd of July this system of enemy trenches was blind with jungle, partly abattis heaped by the enemy as obstruction, partly uncleared scrub, and partly tree-tops cut off by our shell fire. The trenches at the edges of the wood were strongly manned with riflemen and machine gunners.

Above the highest, northern part of the wood the ground rises to a high chalk table-land about as big



as the wood (1,000 yards long by 4,500 broad) and shaped rather like a boot raised to squash Fricourt flat. On this small boot-shaped plateau were more defences, designed, as a soldier has said, "more as temporary unpleasantnesses than as permanent works." The boot is strangely isolated by gullies and valleys. At the heel is the deep gully of the Contalmaison Road, at the sole is the valley of Mametz, and at the instep is a deep romantic curving valley, with the abrupt, sharply cut sides so often seen in a chalk country. This last valley, from its depth, steepness, and isolation, was known by our men as Shelter Valley.

The defences of the boot-shaped table-land were as follows: A line of trench known as Railway Alley, which ran (N.E.) from Fricourt Wood towards the toe; odds and ends of work about (1) a farm, (2) a copse called the Poodles, and (3), a crucifix along the leg of the boot; a strong field fortress in the biggish copse called Shelter Wood, which hangs like a curtain of shrubs and trees on the steep wall of the valley, at the top of the leg; the trenched copses, called Lozenge Wood and the Dingle, on the heel and back.

Beyond Shelter Valley to the north the ground rises to another hill of about the same height as the boot. Men in important works on this hill could,

and did, fire upon our men during all the fighting for the possession of the boot.

At dawn on the 2nd of July our troops advanced to the storm of Fricourt Wood, the Contalmaison Road, Shelter Wood, and as much of the boot-shaped plateau as they could take. As they advanced, the massed machine guns in all the trenches and strongholds opened upon them. They got across the field of this fire into Fricourt Wood to an indescribable day which will never be known about nor imagined. They climbed over fallen trees and were caught in branches, and were shot when caught. It took them all day to clear that jungle; but they did clear it, and by dark they were almost out at the northern end, where Railway Alley lay in front of them on the roll of the hill. Further to the north, on the top of the leg of the boot, our men stormed the Shelter Wood and fought in that 200 yards of copse for four bloody and awful hours, with bomb and bayonet, body to body, till the wood was heaped with corpses, but in our hands.

Long before our men had secured the two woods the Fricourt Salient was wholly ours. The village was shut off from succour and escape by our capture of the end of the wood at about ten o'clock that morning. By noon all the dugouts in Fricourt had been cleared of the enemy, and by tea-time they had

become posts and quarters for our own men. They were the first first-rate enemy dugouts captured by us in good condition. They were deep, well-made underground dwellings, electrically lit, with walls pannelled with wood and covered with cretonne. They were well furnished with luxuries, equipment, and supplies. The dugouts, which had once been the headquarters of the hidden battery in the gully, were taken over as dressing-stations. In one dugout there were signs that a lady had been a visitor. In another there was a downward-drooping bulge in the ceiling, where a big English shell had almost come through on some wet day when the ground was soft. The shell had not burst, but no doubt it had "lowered the moral tone some" in those who were sitting in the room at the time.

During the 3rd of July our men stormed Railway Alley and secured the whole of the boot-shaped hill by capturing the other fortresses of the Poodles and the Crucifix.

This Fricourt fighting increased our gains in the centre of our advance. On the right, our men on the top of the ridge of Montauban, though often sharply attacked, and always heavily shelled, were preparing to go down the hill to the attack of the enemy in the valley beneath them.

This valley is a long, narrow valley between big

chalk bluffs. The eastern end of it runs into the valley which parts Mametz from Fricourt. Near this eastern end of it, mainly on the steep slopes of the hill, is a long, bent, narrow ribbon of woodland, so planted that each end commands one end of the valley. This strip of woodland is not remarkable in any way. It is a copse hanging on a steep chalk bank, such as one may see in any chalk country. The enemy had made it a strong redoubt to defend the flanks of the valley, and men advancing northward from Montauban had to take it before they could reach the valley and proceed against the hill beyond. From its appearance on the map, which recalls (to the lively fancy) a looping caterpillar, this wood was called Caterpillar Wood, though it is quite as like a boomerang or a sickle. Just to the north of it is a little fortified copsed dingle known as Marlborough Wood. Preparation for the capture of these two strongholds occupied the right of our advance while Fricourt was being taken by our centre.

Meanwhile, on the left of our advance, to the west of Fricourt, our attack had straightened and cleared the line as far as La Boisselle. At this village and at Ovillers, further to the west, our progress was slow and costly.

At both places there was almost no visible enemy

work. What trenches remained our men could carry or blow out of trace, but the main strongholds in both villages were not in trenches, but under the wreck of the houses.

It so happened that the lie of the ground made it very difficult for our men to see what was left of either village. Both places lay on the sides of hills in such a way that our best views of them were from distances. Ovillers village lay along a road at right angles with our front line. Rising ground and big enemy parapets hid it from our front line. Ovillers Hill hedged it in on the west side and Ovillers Wood on the north; on the east there was Mash Valley, which still belonged to the enemy. We could see Ovillers from the Usna Hill behind our front line, but all that we could see were a few skeleton sheds of plasterless woodwork still supporting a few tiles, and a number of heaps of broken brick, among which were heaps of earth and the stumps of trees. There was nothing like order or arrangement in the village. The place looked like a deserted brickfield, made blind by the growth of brambles and weeds. There was nothing in the place that looked like a fort or seemed to hold an enemy.

La Boisselle was on a gentle slope above our front line and shut from it by heaps of chalk. It, too, could be seen from the Usna-Tara Hill. It, too, had

a few skeleton sheds at that time, and a great many tree stumps, for, though it may seem strange to those who see the place to-day, when the tree stumps are gone, the village stood in a clump of trees, like so many other Picardy villages.

Those who looked at it through glasses from the Usna-Tara Hill could see little in it that seemed defensible but a collection of mounds of chalk, rubble, and broken brick. Further up the hill on which it stood were enemy lines, with secure communication along the spur from Pozières. The village itself seemed uninhabitable.

It may be that in the archives of the armies engaged there are plans of the enemy defences in both places, as they were before they were attacked and counter-attacked. Both places were as strong as cunning could make them. Underneath both, linking cellar to cellar, and foundation to foundation, were deep, strongly panelled passages, in which, at intervals, were posts for machine guns, so arranged that the muzzle of the gun in its embrasure was only a few inches above the level of the ground outside. From without, one saw nothing, even close at hand, but heaps of rubble and chalk. Within, were these neat narrow galleries, with living rooms beneath them, and secure underground bolt holes to positions in the rear in case of need. They were large scale

examples of the Mouquet Farm type of fortress. They were important points; for if they fell they opened the way to the plateau and the whole position south of the Ancre. Orders had been given to the garrisons that they were to hold the places to the death. . . . Both places were well supplied with munitions and food. For water, they had underground access to the wells of the villages. For men, they had underground approaches quite unknown to us. They were, in every way, well prepared, either for siege or assault.

It is impossible to take fortresses of this kind swiftly. Even if they are surrounded, as at Mouquet Farm later in the battle, they may still hold out and interrupt an advance. If they are shelled, they are under the ground, unseen and unknown; the shells can only reach them by chance; no man can say that the artillery has destroyed them, even after days of shelling. The area, perhaps a quarter of a mile square, may be whelmed with gas for a week. The defenders have their gas masks and oxygen cylinders. The place may be stormed and covered with troops, who may yet see no enemy, for there is no enemy to be seen, except little spurts of fire from holes a few inches long in the heaps of rubble on the ground. Then if desperate, brave souls among the attackers break into those heaps of rubble with pick and

shovel and get down into the galleries and fight there, bombing their way through one black channel to another, till the place is, as they think, clear, there may still come a rush of reinforcements along the tunnels of escape and the conquerors may be driven out.

The attacks upon La Boisselle and Ovillers went on throughout the second day of fighting. The progress made was slight, though many who watched it have said that the fighting round those two points, in these early days of the battle, was some of the hardest, bravest, and bloodiest of the whole war. The enemy knew that we should attack them and how we should have to attack; the ranges were known to an inch, and field batteries were concentrated upon them. Our men had to creep up a glacis, through a barrage, to storm a fort which no man could see. Often, in that groping in the chalk heaps for some sign of the stronghold, the sudden falling of a platoon was the first sign that the objective was reached. Let the reader imagine any quarter mile of hill-side known to him, and think to himself that hidden in every ten yards of that space is an infernal machine which will kill him if he touches it or comes near it, but that he has to run to that space, none the less, and destroy every infernal machine, while fire and flying iron rain down



upon him out of the air. That was the task at Ovillers and at La Boisselle. The men who went against those two places did not "dodge death," as the phrase goes, they walked and stumbled across a dark lane which was death. There was a sort of belt of darkness, or cloud, in front of those two ruins, and in that cloud death crashed and whirred and glittered and was devilish. Those who stumbled across it unhit had to creep from pit to pit and from ruin to ruin, looking for the holes in the ground through which the enemy was firing. One man, finding an embrasure through which a machine gun was firing, crept to a cover and fired at the embrasure with his rifle, while his mate, with a pick-axe, picked a hole in the rubble above it big enough for them to fling their bombs down. One evil point of both positions was that they stood on spurs of hill which were roughly parallel with each other, and not more than 600 yards apart. Men on the flank of one spur could sit in cover in almost perfect safety, watching our men attacking the other spur on the opposite side of the valley. It was therefore possible for the enemy to put a cross-fire with machine guns upon either attack. Neither attack progressed far during this hot summer Sunday of July 2.

But during the fighting at La Boisselle a party of North Country English soldiers, attacking to the east

of the village, met with a success which had not been planned for them. They got into the enemy's line, and (as far as one can tell) progressed eastwards along it, fighting their way, till they were in the village of Contalmaison, nearly a mile from any support. Here they were captured, but as Contalmaison became the central objective, as soon as we held Shelter Wood their captivity did not last long.

Between the 2nd and the 14th of July, our advance was, in the main, a sapping up to the enemy second-line position, which we presently reached and attacked. All of this sapping up was a bitterly hard fight, in which our men and the enemy were hand to hand for many hours together in all the contested points. The men met each other face to face in trenches and shell-holes and blew each other to pieces with bombs point-blank. On the right, fighting on these terms, our men won the Caterpillar Valley; on the left, they attacked La Boisselle, and pushed on at Ovillers so that its capture became certain. But in the centre, the enemy had an intermediate position, where the fighting was more complex, more difficult, and more bloody than on either of the wings. This intermediate position consisted of two parallel spurs of chalk between the enemy's first and second lines. The eastern spur is almost covered with the

Wood of Mametz; the western spur is clear of woodland save for two or three tiny copses. It is a bare, swelling chalk hill, on the top of which there stood (at that time) the ruins of the village of Contalmaison.

These spurs lie between those formations in the chalk which lent themselves to the enemy's first and second main positions. Neither would come readily into either big system. The enemy had not taken special pains to fortify them, as the enemy reckons special pains, but both were naturally strong positions, and both had been made stronger by art. These places may now be described.

A boot-shaped chalk hill to the north of Fricourt, and a deep, narrow, lovely, steep-sided gully, known as Shelter Valley, to the north of the boot, have been mentioned. Just beyond Shelter Valley, and bounded by it as by a river, to the west and south, is the big, bold, swelling, rather steep, shovel-headed snout of spur on the top of which Contalmaison stood. Right at the end of this snout, and low down, so as to be almost in the valley, is an oblong copse called Bottom Wood. Just above this, running diagonally across the spur, is a linchet, once lined with trees. Just above this there is a half-sunken track or lane running parallel with the linchet. Just above this, on the eastern side of the spur, was a strong enemy

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work called the Quadrangle, so sited that men approaching it from the south could be seen and fired at from the work itself, from the high ground on both flanks, and from the rear. Well-hidden support-lines linked this work with Contalmaison village (behind it) and with Mametz Wood (to the east flank). This work defended the spur on the eastern side.

On the west side, the spur was defended (*a*) by the work in Shelter Wood, which we had won, (*b*) by two fortified copses to the north of Shelter Wood, and (*c*) by a field work (to the north of these copses) called the Horseshoe. These western works were not on the spur, but on that side of Shelter Valley which was mainly in our hands.

Contalmaison itself lay on the top of the spur, about 500 yards to the north-east of the Horseshoe. It had a perfect field of fire in all directions. It was trenched about with a wired line, which was strongly held.

In itself, it was a tiny French hamlet at a point where a road from Fricourt to Pozières crosses a road from La Boisselle to Bazentin. It may have contained as many as fifty families in the old days before the war. Most of these were occupied on the land, but there was also a local industry, done by women, children, and old men, of the making of

pearl-buttons. There was a church in the heart of the village, and just to the north of it a big three-storied French château, in red brick, with white and yellow facings, and a turret *en poivrière* in the modern style. This château stood slightly above the rest of the village.

The second or eastern spur lies parallel with this Contalmaison spur, and is parted from it by a narrow shelving valley or gully. It is more sharply pointed and shelving than the Contalmaison spur, and (perhaps) a few feet lower. Otherwise, it is of much the same size. The extreme point of this spur is bare chalk hill, but the bulk of it is covered with the big wood of Mametz, which splits (about half-way down the spur) into three projecting tines or prongs of woodland, parted by expanses of fallow. On the map, the wood looks something like a clumsy trident with the points to the south, threatening our advance. The spur rises due northward in a gradual ascent. The highest part of the wood is at its northern limit, and here, at its highest point, the ground suddenly breaks away in what may either be a natural scarp or the remains of an old quarry. The steep banks are wooded over now, and much dug into for shelter. Here the enemy made his main defence, with a redoubt of machine guns and trench mortars.

It seems likely that before the war the wood was

without undergrowth ; but after the enemy occupation the shrubs were allowed to grow as screens to the defence. The trees were fine, promising timber, but not of great size in any part of the wood. Among them were horn-beams, limes, oaks, and a few beeches. The undergrowth, after two and a half years of neglect, was very wild and thick, especially in the northern part, where there was much bramble as well as hazel-bush. Our bombardment had destroyed many of the trees, and the enemy counter-bombardment destroyed others during the fighting. This made the going below even more blind and difficult, for it had tossed down many boughs and tree-tops, in full leaf, into the undergrowth, so as to make a loose abattis, exceedingly difficult to pierce or see through. In some of the bigger trees the enemy had built little machine-gun posts, so well *camouflé* or protectively coloured with green and grey paint that they were almost invisible, even from quite close at hand. Some heavy guns of position were in the wood, and field guns were in battery in the road behind the scarp at the wood's northern end. In the lower part of the wood barbed wire was strung from tree to tree, and machine-gun pits were dotted here and there to command the few clearings. Works on the Contalmaison spur, to the west, and on the Bazentin spur, to the east, were so sited that

they could rake an attack upon the wood with a cross, flanking, and plunging fire from half-rifle range.

After the taking of the Poodles and Shelter Wood, our men moved to the assault of these two spurs.

On the right they took position on the east flank of Mametz Wood; in the centre they attacked the Quadrangle and the Horseshoe; and on the left, in pouring rain, in the mud of the Somme, they got into the underground pits of La Boisselle, and made the place ours. This pouring rain was a misfortune.

In modern war wet weather favours the defence. It is especially harassing to the attacker when it falls, as it so often has fallen in this war, at the moment of a first success, when so much depends on the roads being hard enough to bear the advancing cannon which secure a conquered strip. Our success between Maricourt and Ovillers had made it necessary to advance our guns along a front of six miles, which means that we had to put suddenly, upon little country roads, only one of which was reasonably good, and none of which had been used for wheeled traffic for the best part of two years, while all had been shelled, trenched across, and mined, at intervals, in all that time, a great traffic of horses, guns, caissons, and mechanical transport. When

the weather broke, as it broke on the 4th of July, 1916, the holes and trenches to be filled in became canals and pools, and the surface of the earth a rottenness. The work was multiplied fifty-fold and precious time was lost.

The rain hindered our advance during the next three days, though our attacks on the approaches to Contalmaison and Mametz Wood proceeded. On the west side of the Contalmaison spur our men carried the fortified copses and won the Horseshoe, after three days of most bloody and determined fighting in a little field. On the east side of the Contalmaison spur our men attacked the Quadrangle, got three sides of it, and attacked the fourth. This fourth side, known as the Quadrangle Support, could be reinforced from Contalmaison and from Mametz Wood, and could be observed and fired into from both places, so that though our men got into it and took it in a night attack, they could not hold it.

When the Horseshoe fell, early on July 7, a big attack was put in against the whole of these two spurs. It began with a very heavy bombardment upon the ruins of the village and the wood, and was followed by the storm of the village from the west and south-west, and an advance into the wood. Our men reached the village, took part of it, and found (and released) in one of the dugouts there that party



of English Fusiliers who had been captured by the enemy on the 2nd of July. At this point of the attack a very violent, blinding rain began, which went on for twelve hours. This rain made it impossible for our gunners to see where our men were. In order not to kill them, our fire on the ruins slackened, and in the lull, in all the welter of the storm, the enemy contrived a counter-attack, which beat our troops back to the ruins at the south of the village, where they established a line. The attack on the wood brought our line forward through the outer horns of copse up to the body of the wood.

For the next two days our artillery shelled both wood and ruins, while plans were made for the next assault. The only "easy" approach to Contalmaison was from the west, near the Horseshoe, where the slope is gentler than it is to the south or south-west. The eastern approach was still blocked by the Quadrangle Support. The "easy" approach was not without its difficulties. Troops using it had to go down a slope into Shelter Valley (here gentle, open, and without shelter) in full view of the enemy entrenched above him. As soon as they were in the valley, under fire to their front, they were in full view of the enemy round Pozières, who could take them in flank and rear. Worse still, the whole of this part of the valley was commanded by well-con-

trived machine-gun posts on a little spur, sometimes called the Quarry Spur, 500 yards to the north. However, this approach, bad as it was, was easy compared with the others. On the 10th of July the attack on the two spurs began again. In the right and centre our men went into the wood and into Quadrangle Support. On the left, they went across the "easy" approach in four successive waves, behind a "creeping barrage" or wall of shell fire advancing in front of them. They got into the village, without great loss. It was a compact village grouped at a road-knot, with little enclosed gardens. In that narrow space, in the cellars, in the dugouts under the cellars, and in the sunken roads, like deep trenches, close to the village, they fought what many believed to be the hardest body-to-body battle of this war. The village was very strongly held. The garrison outnumbered the attackers; in fact, the enemy dead and prisoners outnumbered the attackers. Contalmaison was won by the manhood of our men. When the enemy broke from the village to escape to the north, some Lewis gunners got on to them and caused them heavy loss.

That night our line was secure in Contalmaison. The Quadrangle to the right of it was ours, and more than half of Mametz Wood was ours. Men can feel what our soldiers faced in the storm of Contalmaison.

There they were in the open with the enemy's trenches in front of them up above. But who can tell what they faced in Mametz Wood? The wood was partly on fire and full of smoke. The enemy was in strength and hidden. Our troops in the attack were thrusting through brambles, shrubs, scrub, and hazels, clambering over tree-tops and broken branches, cutting through wire and stumbling into pits, under what some have described as a rain of bullets, which fell from above and drove in from front and flanks. It is the biggest wood on the field. It is more than 200 acres in extent. There were four of our battalions in it at one time. Our men had to command themselves; for the only orders that could be given to them were to push uphill, driving back the enemy, and to hold what they won. After Contalmaison fell, on the evening of the 10th, the position was easier, on the left flank of the wood. The next day, after heavy losses, our men won the end of the wood, and came out on the other side, facing the Longueval Road, with the enemy main second line straight in front of them not a quarter of a mile away. In the last terrible attack on the end of the wood they took all the machine guns and trench mortars which had delayed the advance.

Meanwhile, away to the right, on the extreme right flank of our advance, there had been much

bloody and heroic fighting for elbow room. Our men had tried to widen the gap of their advance by attacks to the eastward. They had captured the big wood of Bernafay, near Montauban, and had attacked the bigger wood of Trones, which lies parallel with it a little to the east. They had captured Trones Wood more than once, but could not hold it, owing to enemy machine guns on the (very slightly) higher ground outside the wood to the north and east. In this fighting, our soldiers came for the first time against the defences of the stronghold of Guillemont.

These assaults on Trones Wood and the capture of Mametz Wood are generally reckoned to be the last events in the first stage of the Somme battle. The wood of Mametz was the last part of the enemy's first-line and intermediate-line defences in the path of our advance. Beyond it was the second main position, which needed a battle to itself. The first main position, in that part of the line, was all our own.

In the twelve days' fighting, on the sixteen-mile front, we had advanced upon a front of about  $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles, for distances varying from  $1\frac{1}{4}$  to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles. It is true that within this captured territory one little patch, the fort of the ruins of Ovillers-la-Boisselle, was still defended, but it was surrounded, it could not be succoured, and had to fall within a few days

(it fell on the 17th). The new line ran from Authuille Wood, over Ovillers Hill, so as to shut in Ovillers, across Mash Valley and beyond, so as to shut in La Boisselle, across Shelter Valley and the chalk hill, so as to shut in Contalmaison, and then over the next spur, so as to take in Mametz Wood.

At Mametz Wood, the line turned south, down the gully on the wood's east side for about 1,000 yards, when it turned eastward into the valley of Caterpillar Wood. This valley, mentioned and described some pages earlier, runs roughly eastward for a couple of miles from Mametz Wood. Roughly speaking, it marked our line as it was at the end of this first stage of the battle. Trones Wood, which marked our extreme right, and though not held, either by us or by the enemy, contained a party of our men who could not go on, but would not come back, lies just beyond the eastern end of this valley.

The expanse of ground won by us in these first days of the battle was not large; it made but a tiny mark upon the map of France; but in this act of the war, which was so like a slow siege, victory was not measured by the expanse of territory won so much as by the value of the fortifications reduced. The first-line fortifications which we had taken were as strong as anything in the line and covered Bapaume, with its knot of roads, and the railway

junction near it. The first line had been broken without great difficulty, and though the enemy resistance had stiffened and many more guns had been concentrated against us, we were within striking distance of his second line, from near Pozières to Guillemont, and if this fell with reasonable speed, it was thought, by some, that we might be in front of the ridge on which Bapaume stands before the autumn rain made great operations impossible.

The second main enemy line (south of the Ancre) ran from the high ground or plateau top behind Thiepval along all the high part of the desolate, flat, fertile downland which makes the battlefield of the Somme. It runs pretty straight for  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles, from the Ancre to the wood of Bazentin-le-Petit. Here it bends a little, to take in the wood and adapt itself to the ground, which is here thrust into by the two gullies which border Mametz Wood. It then crosses the eastern gully, takes in another wood on a steep hill, called the wood and hill of Bazentin-le-Grand, shuts in the village of that name (which, in spite of its name, was smaller, though more compact, than Bazentin-le-Petit), and continues along the brow of steep, bold, rolling chalk hills for a mile or two. The bold, rolling hills then merge themselves with high plateau land, as dull, but not as desolate, as the high ground above Thiepval. The wood of

Trones thrusts a straggling point of woodland into this plateau. To the north of this point is another, larger and broader, wood growing beside what was once a straggling village, built of red brick, and containing a prosperous sugar factory. The village was called Longueval, the wood is the famous wood of Delville. The line took in the wood, turned to the south so as to cover the village of Guillemont, and then ran away downhill, to the broken, steep valleys outside Maurepas and the marshy course of the Somme River.

The line was double throughout. The front line was a deep, strong, well-wired, well-sited trench, containing many dugouts, and one concrete fortlet in the parapet to every fifty yards of front. The line ran at the top of a gentle slope, in some places hardly perceptible, so that the field of fire swept by it was large, without dead ground and without natural cover. The wire in front of the line was formidable, though not so thick and strong as the wire of the first-line system at the beginning of the battle. The second line of this second system lay about one hundred yards behind the front line. It, too, was wired, and the line was a good and well-sited trench, though without dugouts and concrete forts. Parts of this second system became very famous, later in the battle, under many different names. The ominous

and bloody names of Zollern Redoubt, O.G. 1 and O.G. 2, were applied to parts of this second main line. They will be mentioned in their proper place.

For two days after Mametz Wood was won there was no main attack, but much work was done in securing the captured ground, repelling enemy raids, and making ready for the assault on the second line. It was decided to attack this second line, wherever our troops fronted it, at a little before dawn on the morning of the 14th of July.

The dangers of the attempt were plain from the lie of the ground. All of this second line was a strong position, even without the hidden defences which nothing but an attack could unmask. To the left, in the centre, and on the right, the ground favoured the defenders. The attackers had to advance uphill, under observation, to positions backed and flanked by great blind woods. The wood on the left (that of Bazentin-le-Petit), though visibly less full of scrub than Mametz Wood, was 1,000 yards broad, sloping gently uphill, like Mametz Wood, and quite likely to be as difficult to take. It was certain to be crossed with many trenches and to contain many hidden machine guns. The formation in the centre, where the wood of Bazentin-le-Grand sticks out on its knoll, offered a problem by itself. If the enemy could hold it, he could make it impossible



for us to take the positions on its flanks. If the enemy lost it, yet managed to hold either flank, fire from that flank could make it untenable by us. Setting aside the difficulties of the position to be attacked, we had also to consider the difficulties of our own position, which made a curving, irregular bulge in the enemy front, big if compared with ground won in an ancient battle, but really so small that the centre, about the spur of Bazentin-le-Grand, was within field-gun range from both flanks and received fire from three sides at once.

During the 13th, white leading tapes had been run out to the front as guiding marks to the attackers. At about midnight of the 13th-14th, strong patrols went out to cover the advance. The battalions named for the attack formed up in the open behind these covering squads, and advanced across the open to their positions. There was no moon, and the night, though a summer night and not naturally very dark, was cloudy. All the ground over which the battalions advanced was under fire, and littered and obstructed with the mess of war. In the advance, the men had to cross trenches inclined at all angles to their line of march; they had to pass dugouts, gun emplacements, lines of wire, fallen trees, woodland, brushwood, and copses, and to keep touch, none the less, with the platoons to right and left. It

was as difficult as a night march can be, though the distance to go was in all cases less than a mile (uphill). Even for so short a distance, an advance in line of battle by night, over ground so broken, would be a difficult feat in time of peace.

Most soldiers (French and English) who saw the Somme fighting have agreed that this bringing up of the army to attack on the 14th of July was a feat of arms of which any nation might be proud.

The artillery preparation for this attack was fiercer than anything which had gone before it. Longueval, already much battered, ceased to be a village, and Delville Wood took on the appearance of a wood in winter. It was soon to take on the appearance of a wood in hell. At a little after three, in the rather cloudy morning of the 14th, the fire heightened to the roll of an intense and terrible barrage, and at half-past three, in a grey light, "when there was just sufficient light to distinguish friend from foe at short ranges," the artillery lifted and the men went over.

The fight which followed was one of the hardest and most successful in which British troops have been engaged. On the left, our men broke over the line into the wood of Bazentin-le-Petit, which was defended much as the wood of Mametz had been. Our men stormed its trenches, cleared out the

machine guns and heavy guns hidden in it, and had won right through it, and come out at the northern end with many prisoners and much material, by seven o'clock. In the centre, our men got into the wood of Bazentin-le-Grand, and into the village of that name beside it. They beat the enemy down the hill beyond, and chased him up the opposite slope, where, in a rush, which won the praise of a French General who watched it with admiration, saying that he had never seen such extreme bravery, they got into the village of Bazentin-le-Petit and made it ours.

At this point our men were right up on the high ground of the plateau or plain, with High Wood, like a lonely island of trees, away to their right.

Before the village was secure as a military position the enemy counter-attacked. The attack was beaten off at about noon, but it was repeated a little later with stronger forces and pushed home. This second attack was repulsed after a hard fight. It was followed by a most resolute and extended attack in which the enemy put in his reserves, with orders that the village was to be retaken and the position restored. This attack, falling heavily on our front from the Flers Road in the direction of the cemetery, drove us out of the village as far as the cross-roads near the church. Here our supports

came in, the village was retaken, and our men beat the enemy back, with heavy losses, to his trench.

At the same time, as the enemy was much shaken from the last of his four defeats, an attempt was made upon High Wood. Cavalry which had been held in readiness, in case a chance should offer during the battle, were now sent forward on the flanks of some infantry to clear the standing corn which covered the field as far as High Wood. The wood itself, which, like all woods within the enemy system, was trenched round, and so netted with lines as to be a very powerful fortress, was shelled heavily. The cavalry (a squadron of lancers) cleared the corn, and the infantry assaulted the southern face of the wood, got into it, went through most of it, and took some prisoners there. The wood is a big plantation, say, 700 yards long by 500 across. The northern side tilts slightly downhill towards the long, bare, gentle slope which made the field of the autumn fighting. The southern side, which was the side attacked by our men on the 14th of July, is nearly flat. The trees are well grown but not big timber, and the undergrowth at the time of the battle was thick. In the heart of the wood there were at least two permanent concrete emplacements for single heavy guns.

Men who were in this afternoon attack on the wood

have spoken of the exultation with which they went in. Firstly, they had beaten the enemy throughout the day, from post to post, and in every one of three big counter-attacks. Secondly, they had won clear from the strip of land poxed with the blastings of two years' fighting. Those who went over that land later in the battle may find it difficult to believe, but on the 14th of July all the field in front of the wood bore harvest, and the wood was green. The coming into that undefiled country was a delight to the men. It is a fact that many of them cheered "for being among green things again." Thirdly, the knowledge that cavalry were fighting side by side with them gave them great joy. They felt that it was a sign that the war of trenches was going to give way to a war of movement, and that perhaps they were on the eve of great events. They took all the wood except the northern point, which was flanked by the switch line to Flers on one side, and by the boundary trench or hedge of the wood on the other. The fighting was very bitter here and very deadly. Long afterwards the bones of an enemy machine gunner, lodged on the spike of a tree, showed what the fight had been.

This taking of High Wood was the high-water mark and limit of the tide of conquest of the 14th of July. It brought us, with a rush, right on to the top

of the plateau and (in High Wood) almost to its northern edge, so that our men could see the great, gentle, beautiful valley, coloured with the harvest in all its sweep, and the distant ridge beyond, dark with woodland, and lined with red brick chimneys above, covering the prize of Bapaume. The left and centre of our attack had endured and achieved more than had been expected. On the right, towards Longueval, our success had been as notable.

On the right our men attacked, roughly speaking, due north, keeping strong flanking parties to the east of their advance to check any attack from the enemy fortress of Guillemont. They rushed the long, straggling northern end of Trones Wood on the slope above them and set free that patrol of two companies of Kentish soldiers who had been fighting there all night surrounded by the enemy. A thrust was then made to the east, towards Guillemont, while the main attack went on, up the slope, to Longueval and the edge of Delville Wood. Our men got into Longueval, cleared the two straggling streets to the road-meet in the heart of the village, and there came against the defence which was to make the place a hot corner for some time to come.

From the heart of the village, where the roads meet near the church, the ground slopes downhill towards Flers. The northern half of the village was

built upon this sloping ground, which is a narrow, shallow valley, a quarter of a mile broad, at right angles with the village street. On both sides of the road there were plantations and orchards, not now to be distinguished from the main ruin of Delville Wood, but at the time of the fighting they were separate and fairly trim. The road through these plantations was lined with ruins, which the enemy defended ably. To the north of the shallow valley the ground rose up to the plateau crowned by High Wood. Most of this plateau was still strongly held by the enemy, who could see from it, fairly clearly, through the thinned wood, what was happening in the northern half of the village. The wood and the plantations masked the approach of troops coming to the relief of this part of the village, so that, what with a fairly well-observed artillery fire and a well-hidden line of support, the enemy had an advantage. By midday, the battle of Longueval had become a most bitter hand-to-hand struggle, in which our men gradually got the mastery. Most, or very nearly all, of this northern strip was in our hands by four o'clock, though two points just outside the village—one in the horn of Delville Wood, and one in an orchard on the hill to the west of it—still held out. All this area was soon to become the scene of some of the most terrible of the fighting of this war.

Delville Wood was very soon to earn its name of Devil or Devil's Wood. The enemy shelling concentrated on this area and became most terrible.

The fighting here was not without compensation. One who was there remembered the taking of Longueval with pleasure, for in clearing out an enemy dugout he came upon a store of cigars. "Jolly good mild cigars; enough to give every man in the platoon a box, and so many that the Boche must have been giving cigars as an issue, at any rate, to the officers. We thought at first that they may have been poisoned and left behind as a booby trap, but we soon proved that." Another, in the same attack, saw a young private come out of an enemy dugout with a bottle of brandy. He very rashly brandished this bottle, crying out, "See what I've got." An old sergeant saw him, and said: "You're too young to be drinking that poison. You hand that over to me;" so the sergeant had it. But a captain who had seen the matter said to the sergeant: "You're too old to be drinking that poison. You hand that over to me." So the captain took it and kept it. One little action of devotion may be quoted, for even though it deals with eating and drinking, it was yet another of those countless heroisms of the carriers which are so seldom noticed and rewarded,



though they happen every day in all weathers and under all fires.

A platoon had been fighting all day in the Longueval district, and had reached a strip of old enemy trench just outside Delville Wood. They tumbled into the trench and prepared to pass the night there. All were dog tired, much shelling was going on, and all, though hungry, had given up all hope of food. At about ten that night, while they were getting what sleep they could in the devilish racket of the shelling, one of the officers was roused "by a little pale voice asking, 'Is Captain — here?'" It was the battalion mess-servant who had brought up dinner for the officers in a basket. He had picked his way in the dark from Montauban, carrying a heavy basket stuffed with good things, over two miles of road blazing with the enemy barrage. He had brought hot soup in a thermos flask, a tin of salmon, hot bully beef with two vegetables, and some cheese and bread, hot coffee and a bottle of port. When he had served this dinner and collected the dishes and bottles he carried the basket back by the same road, past the same dangers, to Montauban.

This fight of the 14th of July gave us a large stretch of the enemy second line, brought us well on to his fortified plateau, and threatened the great, gently

rolling expanse between Delville Wood and Bapaume. Our men had taken many prisoners and much war material. The enemy had lost heavily in killed and wounded, and had been badly shaken in the fighting round Bazentin, on a front of about a mile. When darkness came, our men were at work securing the new positions and linking them up with the line they had left just before dawn.

The new line now ran roughly south to north, parallel with the Albert-Bapaume Road, from Contalmaison to beyond Bazentin-le-Petit. It made a bend at Bazentin, and ran north-easterly to High Wood, which was a salient. From High Wood it bent back, in a south-easterly line, to Longueval and Delville Wood. From Delville Wood it ran southerly, past Trones Wood, towards the Somme River. The attack had been a great success, and had given us more than all that we had aimed for.

There were inconveniences in the new position. All our gains since the beginning of the battle made a salient, liable to be shelled from the front and from both flanks; but at High Wood we held a salient beyond a salient in a position of great importance to the enemy. It was therefore certain that High Wood would be made very difficult to hold. Further to the right, Delville Wood gave observation over so great a tract that the enemy could not afford to lose

it ; that, too, was certain to be fought for to the last ditch. Our troops attacking or defending Delville had strong enemy positions within half rifle-range on their right flanks and rear, and the only road of supply from Montauban could be shelled from two fronts. Worst of all, the weather was against us : it began to rain hard ; the ground became a quagmire ; the movement of troops and guns became difficult ; and every hardship of war became harder and every difficulty worse. When the cloudy morning came and the fight raged up again, there was bad observation, and our aeroplanes could not detect the new enemy gun positions. With the dawn, attack and counter-attack began : our attacks against the strong points near Longueval, and on the right of our advance towards Ginchy ; the counter-attacks against High Wood and against our hold on Delville Wood. During this second day of the fight, High Wood, the narrow salient, became untenable from shelling. The wounded were carried out of it and the position abandoned, though our line remained not far from it.

At this stage of the battle it became imperative that our extreme right wing, which joined the French extreme left wing in the neighbourhood of Trones Wood, should win room for itself by a thrust to the east. It was necessary that the enemy should be

pushed back from his position between Delville Wood and the Somme, so that the dangerous right angle in our line might be straightened out. Already an intense shell-fire on the Montauban Road, which was the only line of supply to the troops in that angle, made our position difficult. It was plain that the enemy had now brought up his reserves of men and guns, and that the main agony of the Battle of the Somme, the struggle for the high ground of the chalk plateau, from the little town of Combles, where the dene-holes are, to the Schwaben Redoubt above the Ancre, was about to be fought. The weather, which was in the main against us throughout the battle, was against us now. The third week in July, 1916, when this struggle began, was wet; indeed the latter half of the year, while the fighting raged, was wetter than usual, and the last quarter by far the wettest within the memory of man. The weather did not affect the result of the battle, but it delayed it by many weeks.

The main need was to widen our position by winning more ground to the east. The enemy knew this as well as any soldier whose fate led him along the road by Bernafay Wood in those days. From the moment when our men cleared Trones and entered Delville Wood on the 14th of July, he concentrated a great artillery upon all that angle of the

line and poured a continuous rain of shells on our hardly-won positions there. This increased daily for three days and nights, and on the 18th of July, after a very heavy shelling, a powerful enemy counter-attack came down on Delville Wood, and began that series of battles which killed every tree in the wood, and strewed every yard of it with the rags of human bodies. The attack drove us out of most of the wood and out of some of the village of Longueval beyond it, into a line of poor trench which no enemy could ever carry. At the same time, all the right angle of our line was shelled and shelled again, with barrages of all calibres, designed not only to stop our massing for an attack which might give us more room there, but to prepare attacks against us, and to destroy the advantages which had been won.

Though under the fury of this attack the right of our advance was, for the moment, checked, our left (five miles away to the west) was widening the salient thrust by us. On Ovillers Hill, the underground garrison of the Ovillers fortress had surrendered, after a fine defence, and our men had pushed up the Ovillers Spur towards the head of Mash Valley. From the Ovillers Spur, looking eastward, over the broadish, gently shelving Mash Valley-head, they saw the first jutting-out of the parallel spur along which the Albert-Bapaume Road

runs. At the jutting-out they saw the cemetery of Pozières, among a clump of cypress trees, and the straggling end of Pozières village, stretching among trees along a lane towards it. This was to be the next prize to be fought for. The attack which won Ovillers, cleared Ovillers Hill, and opened up Mash Valley, secured the western approaches to Pozières. On the same day (the 17th) the troops near the wood of Bazentin-le-Petit bombed out towards Pozières along the lines of trenches known as O.G. 1 and O.G. 2, secured a part of them, and wired them in against any counter-attack. This, though it did not secure the eastern approaches to Pozières, at least secured a part of them. At the same time the shelling from our guns concentrated upon Pozières, and on the long strip of copse or wood beside it.

Towards the end of this third week in July, in hot, clearing, summer weather, some batteries and battalions of fine men were moving along the roads towards the battlefield of the Somme. They had not been "in" in that battle before this, and although they did not know, it seems that they had generally guessed that they were to go in against Pozières. These men and batteries belonged to the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, and they were coming to the first big battle that had happened since they

landed in France. It is said that these troops, as they moved along the roads in the July days between hedges covered with honeysuckle and shadowed by ranks of plane-trees, felt that they were marching in fairyland ; for they had seen no such earthly beauty in their own lands over the sea, nor in Egypt and Gallipoli, where they had served. Perhaps no soldiers who have been hotly engaged in a modern battle ever really want to go into another. They go in the knowledge that it is their duty, and that their going may end the war and bring peace. These soldiers went in that spirit, but it is said that they felt satisfaction that they were to take part in a big battle with the enemy against whom they had enlisted to fight. About the 20th and 21st of July they came into camp within sound of the battle, and their officers were able to examine the ground which they were to attack. Their attack was to be the crowning act of that part of the battle. It may be well to describe here the nature of the ground of that little place, which for some weeks was as famous to our nation as the town of Troy.

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Pozières was a little village of no interest and no importance strung along the Bapaume Road near the top of the plateau. It was in the main one street of buildings facing each other across the road.

The houses of this street were not all dwellings. Some of them were byres, granaries, and barns, so that the main effect of the street was rude. Most of the houses were built of red brick; the byres and barns were of course plaster or clay daubed upon wooden frames. In the years before the war the village contained about 300 people, most of whom got their livings from the land, for all the plateau was good farm land. It has been said that some of the people (as at Contalmaison) made pearl buttons, but the chief work of the place, as of the Somme battlefield, was farming. The church was the chief building, and next to it in importance was the school. Both seem to have been modern buildings, of no interest. I do not know whether there was any market-place. There was no château. The road ran straight through the village in a north-easterly direction towards Bapaume. It may be said that it cut the village in two, for it divided the one row of houses from the other. In writing of the Battle of Pozières one has to think of this road as a mark or boundary, cutting one part of the battle from the other. Our advance in the battle was towards Bapaume, in the north-easterly direction. It may be better to write of the two halves of the village as lying east and west of the road.

Though the village was poor and without glory it



was the home of men who had given its windy perch a beauty. The village was planted with trees. On the eastern side of the road, at the southern end of the village, these trees made a wood of fine timber, 200 yards long by 100 yards across. Orchards and outliers from this wood ran along the outskirts of the village on this side, behind the gardens of the backs of the houses. In the village street there were a few trees. Just beyond the village (at both ends) the fine plane and poplar trees which mark so many French highways made the road a shady avenue. Two hundred yards from the last house, at the north-east end of the village, the road dipped towards Bapaume. Just before the dip down, on the highest ground of the plateau, and a few yards to the west, or left-hand, side of the road, was the village windmill.

The eastern side of the village street had fewer houses in it than the western side. About midway in the village, the *abreuvoir*, or village watering-place for stock, opened from the road on this eastern side. It was an oblong, surface-drainage pond fenced with brick and shaded with elm-trees. On the western side of the road where the main village stood—for on this side the houses had a southern aspect—the ground rose slightly, perhaps as the result of generations of building. The school and the church both

stood on this side of the village, though well back from the road. Near the church, a lane or country track ran westward from the high road towards the village of Thiepval, two miles away. A few buildings stood near this lane, well to the west of Pozières proper. Beyond them (to the west) was the head of the Mash Valley, which ran parallel with the high road down to La Boisselle. On the western slope of this valley, perhaps 200 yards from the village, was the village cemetery.

Seen from some little distance, from either side of the road, Pozières was like several other Picardy villages: a church tower and some red-tiled roofs among a big clump of fruit and timber trees, wood, and orchard. Being high up, it was waterless, save for a well or two and the rain. It was also as windy as Troy and as visible. From the north and west it was conspicuous for many miles. Men walking near the windmill could be seen from Serre, Pys, Irlès, and Loupart, from three to six miles away. From the north-east it was screened. From the east, it could be seen within a distance of two miles as a kind of ridge or skyline above the shallow pan which may be called the head of Sausage Valley. On this eastern side a distant view of it was blocked by Bazentin Wood. From the south and south-east, from Contalmaison and from the high road between

Mametz and Montauban, it was plainly visible as a clump of trees, and the road to it from Contalmaison was a most conspicuous, whitish, straight line pointing to it. From the south-west, from the high ground of Usna Hill, it appeared as a few buildings, with oofs of red tile in front of a woodland.

The routes by which our troops could attack Pozières were all in full view of the enemy, who had so arranged his trenches and machine guns that to approach from any of the routes was scarcely possible in daylight. The approach by the Mouquet Valley was flanked and enfiladed by fortresses not yet reduced ; those by the Ovillers Hill and Mash Valley were commanded throughout their length by the Pozières plateau. The route by the Albert Road over the big central spur led up a natural glacis, strongly wired, trenched, and flanked. The gully or valley between this central spur and the next to the east contained some dead ground, though the greater part of it could be seen from the village. This gully or valley has been mentioned (in the Contalmaison fighting) as the Quarry Gully, from two small chalk quarries on its eastern bank. The small spur to the east of Quarry Gully hid the next valley—which may be called Hospital Valley (because a dressing-station once stood there)—from the village, though all this valley was plainly visible from the enemy trenches at

its head, which enfiladed it. Beyond this, to the east, is the big spur on which Contalmaison stood. At the north-eastern side of this spur is the wood of Bazentin-le-Petit, which stands on ground a little higher than that on which Pozières stands. In a way it turns Pozières, for troops stationed there are directly on the village's left flank. Troops advancing from this wood towards Pozières had a better chance of success than from any other point. Near this wood, as has been said, they had secured a part of the enemy main position, and had proceeded along it, westward, bombing from bay to bay in both trenches, to within a third of a mile of Pozières itself.

A road or track runs in Quarry Gully. Another, rather better road, runs in Hospital Gully. Both lead into Pozières.

The Quarry Road starts from the Albert-Contalmaison Road at the top of a rise. Just at the junction it is sunken rather deep between banks. When the enemy held that ground, before the beginning of the Battle of the Somme, he dug into these banks for shelter of various kinds. At the junction of the two roads he had dug a field dressing-station, which was taken over and used by our men when we had won the ground. The junction of the roads was often called Dressing-Station Corner for this reason. But it was

always a dangerous place. The enemy shelled it day and night, throughout the Pozières fighting, as a likely piece of road for the passing of men and munitions. Before the end of the Pozières fighting, the junction itself, the strip of road leading downhill from it towards Contalmaison, past the much-blasted copse called Bailiff Wood, and the turn to the left into Quarry Valley, were generally known as Suicide Corner.

The dressing-station was destroyed by a shell during the attack. All the Corner is much battered by shell fire; but the road to Contalmaison, being needed for supply, has been kept in good order. It is now much wider than it was at the time of the fighting. It, too, runs between deep banks at this point. Bailiff Wood may once have cast a shadow on it on summer days, just here, at noon. Since the fight for Pozières, that wood has cast no shadows save from perhaps a dozen spikes of burnt branch, on one of which a magpie has built her nest.

The Corner, towards Pozières, is a rough, steep spur slope, terraced with those regular, steep steps or banks which the French call *remblais*, and our own farmers *linchets*. As usual, the enemy had dug down into these *linchets* for shelter from our fire. On the level terraces on the tops of the *linchets* he had once placed his batteries, and his artillery-

men had lived in the dugouts near-by. In one of the officer's rooms there was a library of good books. Early in the Battle of the Somme, our fire made the Corner untenable, the batteries were destroyed or withdrawn, and the dugouts—with their books, furniture, and officer's possessions—were abandoned to us. All these lincets are much pitted and blasted by shell-fire. There are a few currant bushes on them here and there. The earth is bald, dried reddish mud with a little grass on it. In the winter it looked like the skin of some animal sick of the mange.

From the slopes of the Corner, standing in the wreck of the battery position, one can look up the Quarry Valley and see Pozières at the head of it. From this point, the village seems to stand on a backbone or ridge of earth on the northern skyline. In early July, when our men first saw Pozières from the Corner, it was still fringed with wood on this side, and though the shells had knocked some of the trees away, the place was green and leafy. The trees are on slightly lower ground than the village, for all the fall of the land there is to the south and east. From all this eastern side of the Albert Road, the line of the road along which the village ran makes a kind of ridge or wall. It was a green wall once; early in the battle the dust of the shells had covered it with grey. In the heat haze of July, 1916, that grey wall,

with the blue air trembling above it, was the last thing seen by many hundreds of men.

The Quarry Valley is only fifty yards across. On the eastern side of it is the little spur, before mentioned, with its battered copse. The spur, which was once mainly plough land, is fleeced with coarse grass and dandelions. The many shell-holes are reddish all over it, though the red is mixed with dirty fragments of chalk. The spur itself is a small roll or heave of the ground, perhaps forty feet higher than the valley and one hundred yards across at its widest point.

The slope of the spur on its western side facing the Corner is naturally steep, and has been made steeper by man. A little way from the Corner the bank has been cut into for chalk, and the quarry, though hardly more than a recess, gives some sort of shelter. It is about twenty yards long by ten across, and the depth of the cutting, from top to floor, may be twenty feet.

A little further towards Pozières the Quarry Road forks, and near the fork there is a second quarry in which the chalk is much more clearly laid bare. This quarry is twice the size of the other and about half as deep again. It gives better shelter, as it is deeper than the other and equally well screened, by the lie of the bank, from the view of an enemy

artilleryman in Pozières village. From this point the road to Pozières, by either fork, is across the wreck of battle. All the ground has been blasted and gouged by shells. Men have dug shelters there and heaped up sandbags, and the shells have blown all into pits till the earth is all tettered with the pox of war. Here and there, the approach may still be made by trench. The grass and some of the hardier weeds have begun now to grow in some of those furrows; in others even the earth seems to have been killed, like the men buried there. From these gullies of dried, broken, pitted, and blasted mud, torn into holes, often twenty feet long, ten feet across, and seven feet deep, like nothing else on earth, one goes up the slope to that little Troy upon the hill. Presently one passes into an array of rampikes and stumps over which the hand of war has passed. It is like some Wood of the Suicides. A few trees in it are still recognizable as trees; some even push a few leaves from their burnt stumps. There are ashes, nuts, limes, and hawthorns. The others are stumps, with bunches of splinters at their ends, or erect hags, or like the posts of some execution corner where men are garotted and shot and hung on the cross. Here the ground is so gouged and blasted that the shell-holes run into each other like sloughing sores. The trenches run for a little, are



blasted into the landscape, emerge again for a few yards, and again disappear in some long lake of water or mud. All the ground is littered with the waste of war—tins, equipment, smashed weapons, shells, bombs, bones, rags of uniform, tools, jars, and boxes. In one place, above the wood, in the village itself in what was once the road to Contalmaison, are the traces of an enemy battery position, with broken wheels and many of the wicker panniers used for carrying shells. This road was once hedged, but fire has trimmed the hedge. There are brambles in it still, and dwarf beech, young elm—which will never grow to be old—and the wayfaring-tree. From this point one can enter the village. It was near here that the English-speaking race first entered the village, in the summer night's charge of a year ago.

On both sides of the village street the shells dug confluent pits, then filled them, then dug them again, then dug others, then more, then more, till the ground became a collection of holes with mounds among them. The shells fell thus, on all that ground, for hours and days and weeks and months, till in all the squalor of mud and smash that was once Pozières no sense was left of the home of men. One can see that a village once stood there, for there are broken bricks in the mounds, and old iron farm implements in some of the shell-holes, and the road

has been made like a road again. The houses lie in heaps of rubble and small bits of brick, and where the buildings were important these heaps are bigger than elsewhere.

Three or four landmarks remain on one side of the village and one on the other. On the western side of the road, north of the village, is the mound or hump of the windmill. This is now a heap of earth, cement, and broken concrete stuck about with railway girders. Further south, on the same side, is a part of a single wall of reinforced concrete. This strange grey fragment, which stands on a mound, and was once a part of a very strong enemy fortress built of concrete and iron girders, stands on the site of the school. At a distance it has (to myself) something the look of a loaded camel lying down; but some observers describe it as three flat anvils in a row. It can be plainly seen for many miles in nearly every direction. Further south again, on this side, is the biggish heap of powdered brick, riddled iron, earth, hewn stone, bent metal, and filthy papers that was once Pozières church. At the southern edge of the village on this side, above a lane which straggles round to the cemetery, is another grey concrete fragment, famous in its way. It stands well up on the bank above the lane, overlooking the spur, Mash Valley, and the distance of France, with the trees of

the Amiens Road upon it. It is a little observation post, which could, on occasion, be used as a machine-gun emplacement. A concrete stair near it leads down to a cellar twelve or fifteen feet below. This little post, barely big enough to hold two men, is less conspicuous from a distance than the school-house fragment, but being in the line of our attack was more of a landmark to our soldiers, who called it Gibraltar. Beside it, almost sunk into the mud, are two old enemy gun emplacements covered with balks of timber.

On the eastern side of the road there is only one landmark. About the centre of the village, close to the road, is a hollowing in the mud, as though there had been more shells all together there than elsewhere. This filthy hollow holds water even when most of the shell-boles are dry. At one side of it, low down, are four or five rows of brick where the foundation of a wall once stood. This place is what remains of the *abreuvoir* or watering-place for stock.

None of these places gives any feeling of the habitation of man. No one, looking at the site of the village, can feel that the place was once the home of 300 human beings, who were born and married there, who lived in that street and got good out of those fields, and heard the bells of the church,

and went up and down to market. Looking at the place, one can only feel that it has suffered, and that all round it human beings suffered, in hundreds and thousands, from agony and pain and terror, and that it has won from this a kind of soul.

On the western side of the village, beyond the hedges which once closed the gardens at the backs of the houses on that side, the ground slopes into the head of Mash Valley in a slope so mild that it is almost perfect as a field of fire. If you turn your back upon the village, walk for half a mile across the Mash Valley-head, and then look at the village, it appears as a skyline or ridge, with a few tree-stumps upon it, and those other heaps or marks: the windmill, the school, and Gibraltar. Looking round, from that point, one sees only a markless wilderness of shell-holes, full of water or ice in the winter, and of dryish mud at other times, between which, in the summer, a coarse grass full of weeds thrives knee-deep. From the west through the north to the east the land is all this wilderness as far as the skyline. It is a desert of destruction, with no mark to guide upon it. Up those slopes, all looking alike, on to those plateaux all looking alike, our men advanced upon trenches all looking alike. In that desert they had to advance upon objectives which were indeed points on a map, but in the landscape were like every

other place in sight. The sea has more natural features than that battlefield. The difficulties of the battle were not wholly those of shells and machine guns, but of keeping touch and direction during an advance.

Now that it is out of cultivation, one can find wild flowers all over that battlefield. In July, when the fighting began, it grew the flowers common in cultivated chalk soils at that time of the year: the purple hardhead, pale purple scabious, pale blue chicory; and the common weeds of cultivation: yellow ragwort, red poppies, and blue cornflowers. In the spring and earlier summer it is thickly set with dandelions. On both sides of the road, but especially near the windmill, there are patches of strongly growing henbit. To the east of the road, on the plateau, and in and near the quarry and middle gullies, there are patches of speedwell, ground-ivy, dead-nettle of two kinds, one with pink, one with yellow flowers (which also grows freely in Mametz Wood). Among the grass one can also find dock, milfoil, starwort, stitchwort, "a white, small, starry, cuppy flower," Venus needle, daisy, field madder, Lamb's lettuce, a cut-leaved wild geranium, a veronica, and the little heart's-ease pansy. Perhaps some day, when Australia makes a Campo Santo of the earth of Pozières, these plants may be set there. In their place at

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Pozières, they will grow in Australian dust for ever.

The best view of Pozières is from the east of the Roman Road, from the direction of the main Australian attack. From a point 1,200 yards S.E. from the windmill, the appearance is of a valley of sand, with grass in stretches, and Pozières as the wall of an old town on the horizon. The Authuille Wood is just visible over the saddle or dip in the road, and the town is like a long, low dyke of sand sloping gradually up behind the road. Near the windmill, the actual crest, this dyke is more marked. From Contalmaison, one sees the line of the road (the line of the ridge) with some forty stumps of trees beside it. One can see the traffic on the road passing along the ridge, becoming dim against the background of the village, and then standing out again, clear against the sky as it nears the windmill.

The enemy defences at the time of the attack ringed in both village and wood with trenches. The cellars and piles of ruin had been fitted with machine guns, and the mill, the school, and Gibraltar, were all fortresses of the usual strong, defensive type. The external defences seem to have been :

- (a) To the north : the two lines, old German lines one and two (O.G. 1 and 2), which were dug so as to enfilade any attack upon the village

from the east. At the time of the assault we held these lines to within 600 yards of the village. They lay well to the north of the ruins of the village itself.

(b) To the east : a line shutting in the village and wood, on the line of the old hedge of the wood. This was strongly held.

(c) A sunken light-railway track, which could be held as a trench.

(d) A line or part of a line still further to the east, dug so as to enfilade Hospital Valley, and to link up with the O.Gs.

(e) To the south : a big wired line close to the village, linking it with the intermediate positions at Contalmaison and Mametz Wood. This line ran in front of the lower part of the village, so as to defend the cemetery. From it, minor communication lines ran to the south-west and south-east. All these lines could be, and were, held by the enemy to check our advance. In one of them, last spring, the last surviving hen of Pozières laid some successful eggs.

During the night of Saturday-Sunday, July 22nd-23rd, the troops took up their positions for the attack on the village. The attack was to be made upon the

eastern and southern faces of the position by Australian troops and English Territorials. The English were to advance from the direction of Ovillers Hill and Mash Valley upon the cemetery and that straggling end or outlier of the village which stretched out towards Thiepval. Their right was to rest upon the Albert-Bapaume Road, their left on the strong, newly converted enemy lines on Ovillers Hill. The Australian left was to touch the English right at the road, to push up, in the main direction of the road, from Suicide Corner and Contalmaison, by way of the spur, the Quarry Road, and Hospital Road, so as to close in on the village from the south-east. The Australian right, forming up from about Contalmaison Villa, outside Little Bazentin Wood, to O.G. 1, with their faces to the west, were to charge across the plateau, taking whatever trenches there might be in their path, right into the village, through the wood or copse, and across the gardens to the houses. It was known that the garrison of Pozières had been relieved by a fresh division, and that, like other enemy reliefs, this division had brought in plenty of food and drink. The attack had been prepared by some days of shelling over the whole area. Not much of the village was standing, though one observer speaks of some parts of red-tiled roofs near the cemetery. The smash and ruin were general, but



the place was not obliterated, nor were all the trees razed. The weather had cleared. It was hot, dry, dusty weather, with much haze and stillness in the air. At midnight on the 22nd-23rd of July the attack was timed to begin. It was the first big fight in which the Australians had been engaged since the Battle of Gallipoli, almost a year before. Then they had fallen in in the night for an attack in the dark, which won only glory and regret. This time the battle was to be one of the hardest of the war, and there was to be glory for all and regret for very many, and the prize was to be the key to the ridge of Bapaume beyond the skyline, with possible victory and peace. At midnight, when the men had reached their starting-places, the attack began, and a great wave of Australian infantry went across the plateau towards the east of the village. A part of this wave attacked the enemy who were still holding out in O.G. 1. The rest crossed the plateau, got into one enemy line, which was lightly held or held only by dead men, took it, got into another (really the sunken track of the light railway) which was held more strongly, took that, and so, by successive rushes, and by countless acts of dash and daring, trying (as it happened) to find objectives which our guns had utterly destroyed, they reached the outskirts of the place, across a wreck of a part of the wood.

They made a line from about the southern end of the village to their starting-place near Bazentin Wood.

When the daylight came on that Sunday morning, the Australians were in the village, on the eastern side of the road with the road as their front. Beyond the road they had to their front the tumbled bricks of the main part of the village. To their right, they had a markless wilderness of plateau tilting very slightly upwards to the crest on which the O.G. lines ran. Australians who were there have given accounts of the fighting which won them this position, but, as usually happens in a night attack, those who were there saw little. It seems to be agreed that the second enemy trench was more strongly held than the outer line, and that the right of the attack, which came under direct enfilading fire from the O.Gs., had the hardest task. Some have said that the eastern outskirts of the village were lightly held by the enemy, and that not more than 200 enemy dead were found in that part of the field after the charge, which is very likely, for it was the enemy's custom to hold an advanced post with a few men and many machine guns.

On the left of the attack, on the western side of the road, where the English Territorials were engaged, the objectives were swiftly taken, so that by dawn the

village was shut in as firmly from the south as from the east.

When it was light, both sides tried to reconnoitre. Neither side shelled the village for fear of killing its own men, since neither side, as yet, knew how the lines ran. The two sides sniped at each other from the ruins across the road. Early in the forenoon an Australian officer took a small party across the road into the main ruin of the village, and creeping from one heap of bricks to another, surprised, bombed out, and caused the surrender of a section of the enemy, including a regimental surgeon in his dressing-station. The work of linking up the captured positions went on all through the day under a shell fire which increased steadily as the enemy observers came to know what was going on. The sniping sometimes increased into hot rifle fire.

By ten o'clock on that Sunday night, the Australians had plotted out the main stations of the Pozières garrison. They attacked across the road, bombed out some more dugouts, and cleared the scattered groups of enemy out of the trenches, remains of trenches, converted ditches, and old gun emplacements, where they still made a kind of organized resistance. Having won these places, they linked them up into a system, and dug a communication trench by which men could pass across the

road from one half of the village to the other. This gave them (and secured to us) nearly the whole village, and though there were snipers and bombers who troubled our men, the enemy made no determined counter-attack in force against the village itself.

When day dawned on Monday, 24th of July, the Australians had secured and were occupying practically the whole of the village, and faced, roughly speaking, to a northern front. In front of them was the gentle depression of the northern end of Mash Valley. To their right the ground was almost flat, though trending very slightly uphill from them to the O.G. 1 and 2, only 200 yards away. A hundred yards behind the enemy lines was the wreck of the famous windmill, marking the highest part of the crest, and the nearest point from which the Australians could hope to see into the valley beyond. The Australians' next task was to attack the O.G. lines on their right flank and front, seize the windmill on the crest, and then to take from the enemy his power of observation and his control of all that system of defence.

Before the attacks began, the enemy bombardment came down. At first it was simply a heavy fire upon the village, but it soon increased to a barrage on the district. Sometimes it would lift, to search

Contalmaison and the road past Suicide Corner; then it would play upon the valleys leading up to Pozières and upon those recesses or quarries near them where the little shelter might harbour stores or wounded men. Then it would fall on village and wood in lines and simultaneous dottings of explosion, till a dull red, dirty haze covered the site of the village, and smokes and stinks of all colours and poisons smouldered and rotted in it. In this haze and poison the Australians lived, and dug, and held the line. The first bombardment lasted for four days and nights, and in all that time there was little fighting, by either side, in that district; yet all are agreed that those four days made up some of the hottest battle of this war.

The tactical aim of the Australians was to drive the enemy off the high land. The tactical aim of the enemy was to shell the Australians off it. All are agreed that their shelling was some of the heaviest ever seen. It made a fog all over the high land, and into this fog the Australians disappeared to a feat of endurance which few will know how to praise. So many acts of courage are hot and quick with inspiration, they must be as great a joy to do as to read about. But those swift acts of decision are for individuals, not for masses of men. The holding of the ground of Pozières was done by brigades at a

time. Their casualty lists will show the nature of the work. The appearance of the ground and of the graves marks it to the visitor. It was as hard a service as any that has been on this earth.

One who was there has said: "I went in from Sausage Valley way, past Suicide Corner. At first I only noticed that they were shelling Contalmaison like hell, but when I got down by the Quarry and saw what they were serving out on Pozières, by God, I felt, you may call this war, I call it just sending men to be killed. By God, they were sending some stuff over as we went up. The first thing I knew I was completely buried. I was in a trench when it happened, but there was no trench when I got out. That went on all the time that we were in. We would get some kind of trench dug, and then it would be blown in, and the men buried or killed, and all the time there were crumps, whizz-bangs, and tear-shells till you couldn't hear or see. We would get some kind of a line made and try to make a dump, but you might as well have tried to build a dance-hall and give a dance. I looked back one night and saw the dump in the Quarry burning. They had brought up a lot of lights and star-shells and dumped them there, and a shell had got in among them and set them all off together; they lit up the whole sky."

Another who saw the fighting has said: "About the end of July, I had to go to the C.C.S. (Casualty Clearing Station) at —. The C.C.S. was in the school, at the bottom of a courtyard, and there were benches round the courtyard full of Australians who were all suffering from shell-shock, and they were jumping about and couldn't keep their hands and feet still; I never saw such a sight. One of the doctors said to me: 'I don't know how it is. The Australians must be more highly strung or something. I get more shell-shock cases from among them than from any other units.' 'You silly —,' I said. 'These poor — have been in at Pozières, where they've been shelled to hell for the best part of a week, and nobody else so far has had anything like it.' "

A third has said: "I got a crump on the head the night I first went in, so I don't know much about it, except that that damned trench called Centre Way was a damned unpleasant place to be in."

Centre Way, which is still partly to be traced, ran obliquely from close to the church of Pozières in a north-westerly direction towards the O.G. lines, which it reached about three-quarters of a mile to the west of the windmill. In the markless plain of mud, it was the middle one of three trenches by which the Australians approached the O.G. lines.

A fourth has said: "A damned funny thing happened in the early days of Pozières. The trees in the wood then were not like what they are now, all shot to pieces. Some of them were quite good trees, and we had an O. Pip in one of them (artillery observation post), and had an officer there with a telescope. He was up there with his telescope about the 25th of July. There was a hell of a barrage going on behind him, for they were putting one across the gullies to stop men coming up. He was looking at this barrage one moment, when he saw an Australian coming through the barrage across the open. He was trotting along, almost naked, as we were in the Peninsula, and this officer expected to see him blown to pieces every second, but he came through the barrage all right, and then the officer recognized that it was his own servant coming with a letter. He had to look away for a while, and the next thing he knew the fellow was shouting at him from the foot of the tree. He expected that it would be some urgent thing that might be going to alter the whole campaign, so he put down his telescope, and climbed down and got the letter and read it. It was from the veterinary surgeon, and it said, 'Sir, I have the honour to report that your old mare is suffering from an attack of the strangles.' He acknowledged the letter, and the man went back



the way he came, across the open, hopping through the barrage, and got back all right."

Few men can face such a thing as a modern barrage without awe; none the less, these men did face it, and lived in it, for days together. Under the fiercest of its terror, they bombed out towards the mill, got the mill—or the mound on which it once stood—but could not hold it. Coming again they got the mill and made it theirs, and spreading out to the left, they got the O.Gs., and with the English Territorials they moved forward, up the head of Mash Valley, on to the formless, markless, pocky, mud-barren. Up near the windmill, when they got it, they could peer from their lines through the smoke into the Promised Land.

The ground slopes down to the northward from the windmill, at first very slightly. Three hundred yards from the mill, there is a linchet, some four feet high, running roughly N.W.-S.E. across what was then the Australian front. Beyond this, the ground slopes much more rapidly for some 300 or 400 yards to the village of Courcelette among its trees. When the Australians took the windmill, there was a greenness upon all this slope of hill. The trees of Courcelette were leafy; there were houses in the village; and the great, wide, gently sloping valley beyond was green. It was not long to remain green, but at the Australians'

first sight of it it was green and lovely, though in the hands of the enemy. The Australians, looking down from the windmill across the valley, saw that there was no ground for a strong, defensive line nearer than the ridge of Bapaume, three miles away. They knew that the enemy could not hope to make a permanent line nearer than that, for all the nearer ground was under direct observation. They realized that the capture and holding of the Pozières Ridge would lead to the capture of all the valley below it; not immediately—for there is no position which cannot be defended for a time in modern war as long as there are machine guns—but certainly, and before very long. As they looked over the valley, they saw and heard some great explosions not far below them, in and near Courcellette. The enemy was hurrying away his field guns and blowing up his dumps of field gun ammunition.

This capture of Pozières may be said to mark the end of the second stage of the great battle. The first stage ended in the capture of the first line along some miles of front. This second stage ended in the capture of the second line along some miles of front, thus deepening the wound in the enemy defensive system.

The third stage, beginning even then, in the mark-

less mud towards Thiepval and on the Guillemont plateau, was to widen the wound.

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Enemies and detractors who hate us have said that, after all, the battle was no great affair ; that it took, indeed, a few trenches, at great cost, but did not defeat the enemy nor relieve our Allies, and that we sacrificed our Colonial troops rather than expose our own. Lies are best left to Time, who is the surest confounder of malice ; but some must be answered. To these few liars it may be said that the battle was the first real measuring of strength, on equal terms, between the enemy and ourselves, and that, therefore, it was a great affair. In the early years of the war our picked men had fought their picked men, in the proportion one of ours to seven of theirs, and our men had held them and been killed. In the Battle of the Somme, the picked men on both sides being gone, the fighters were the average of each race, and the result proved that superiority of the British which none in our army had ever doubted. It is true, that our men took a few trenches at great cost. It is also true, that they failed to take a few trenches at the first attack. The same is true of all fighting in all wars. But the result of the battle is written plain on the map of France. There on the map,

and still more plainly on the sacred soil of France, it is marked, that the battle beat the enemy out of his picked defences, where he was strongest, and drove him back, from ditch to ditch, over a ground where all things were in his favour, in spite of all that he could do, for not less than twelve miles. It is not claimed that this was a decisive defeat of the enemy, to rank with the battles which end wars, but it was a sound beating. He did his best to hold his best fortifications, and he could not hold them: he was beaten out of them. If the battle failed to save Roumania, as some of our enemies (not very wisely) cry, it relieved Verdun. As to the lie, that during the battle we sacrificed our Colonial troops rather than expose our own, the graves of our men, in the mud, by the hundred and the thousand, from Maricourt to Gommecourt, and in every acre of the field, are sufficient answer. For each Colonial lost, not less than nine or ten of our men were lost.

In the area of our advance, between Thiepval and Maricourt, the danger was nearly equal in all places. No part of the enemy line was less than a first-class fortress; all parts were well contested; and over all parts there was a heavy fire of cannon of all kinds and of machine guns. The Leipzig, Ovillers, La Boisselle, Fricourt, Mametz, Trones Wood, Bazentin

Woods, Mametz Wood, Contalmaison, Pozières, the Village, Mill, and Cemetery, were all as dangerous and as difficult to storm as the objectives of famous sieges: "Number Four Bastion," the Redan, "the Green Ridge," and the rest. At all of them, the attackers moved to the attack knowing that they went to the near certainty of wounds and death. The area of the advance of this first month of the fight is not large. One could walk round the area, visiting all its famous places, in one summer day, for the distance can only be twenty miles all told. Spring and summer have laid their healing hands upon those places since the fighting. The covering of the grass has come to hide the evidence that those slight slopes and tumbles of brick were once terrible both to take and to hold. Men standing in what is left of Delville Wood, or in the wilderness which was once Pozières, will find it hard to believe that for days together fire rained upon those places, and that men by the hundred and the thousand were buried there, and unburied, and killed, and maimed, and blown into little fragments. Our men lie everywhere in that twenty miles circle, sometimes very thickly, in platoons and companies of the recognized and the unknown. They were our men. Men of our race will never walk that field without the

thought that the wind blowing there took the last breath of many of our people, and that the dust under foot is our flesh.

Our own men will never want for praisers. But in this great battle, some came as guests, from many thousands of miles away, to fight what they saw to be the battle of free communities. Many years hence, when the facts and passions of this war are dim, English writers may forget, not what these men did, but the measure of their gift to us. Now, while the facts are fresh, one may give their guests first place.

Many battalions did nobly in the difficult places of the battle. The field at Gommecourt is heaped with the bodies of Londoners; the London Scottish lie at the Sixteen Poplars; the Yorkshires are outside Serre, the Warwicks in Serre itself; all the great hill of the Hawthorn Ridge is littered with the Middlesex; the Irish are at Hamel, the Kents on the Schwaben, and the Wilts and Dorsets on the Leipzig. Men of all the counties and towns of England, Wales, and Scotland lie scattered among the slopes from Ovillers to Maricourt. English dead pave the road to La Boisselle; the Welsh and the Scotch are in Mametz. In gullies and sheltered places, where wounded could be brought during the fighting, there

are little towns of the dead of all these places :  
"Jolly young Fusiliers, too good to die."

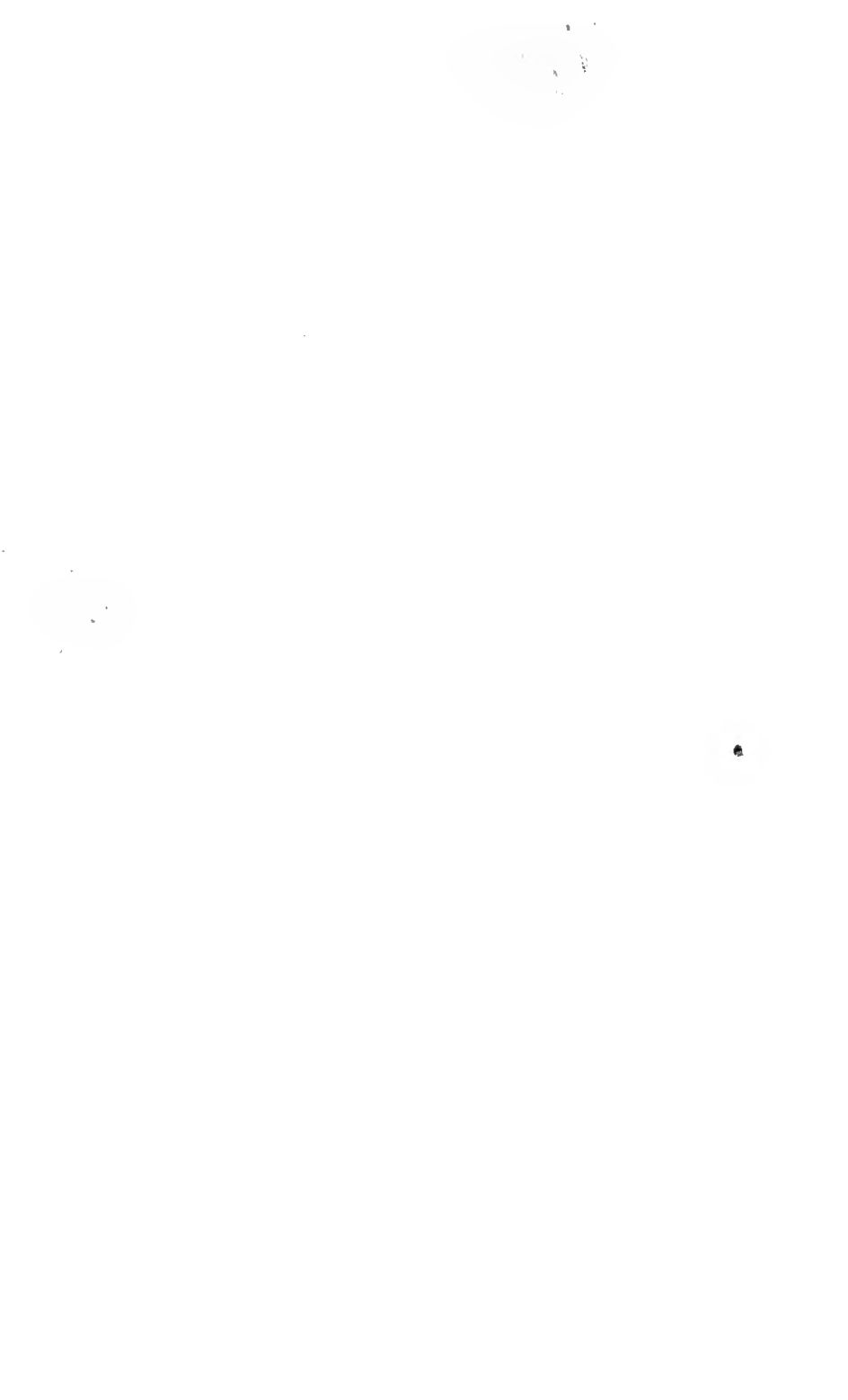
The places where they lie will be forgotten or changed, green things will grow, or have already grown, over their graves. It may be that all these dead will some day be removed to a National graveyard or Holy Field. There are three places, in that wilderness of the field, which should be marked by us. One is the slope of the Hawthorn Ridge, looking down the Y Ravine, where the Newfoundland men attacked. Another is that slope in Delville Wood where the South Africans attacked. The third is all that great expanse from Sausage Valley to the windmill which the Australians won and held. Our own men lie as it was written for them. But over the graves on these three places it should be graven, that these men came from many thousands of miles away, to help their fellow-men in trouble, and that here they lie in the mud, as they chose.

Not long ago, on that old battlefield, an Australian said : "In the Maori war once, some English surrounded some Maoris and sent to tell them to surrender, since they could not escape. The Maoris answered : "We fight 'Akka, akka, akka' (for ever and for ever and for ever). This makes a good war-cry for us."

## 96 THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

When, in future time, the Australian Memorial is placed over the mound of the windmill, to stand sentinel over so many splendid bodies which once went with that cry through the Peninsula and up that plateau, those three words will be sufficient dedication, and sufficient story, for ever and for ever and for ever.







June 1, 1940.

